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## RACE SUICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES. II

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## CAUSES OF THE LOWER BIRTH RATE IN THE CITY

One of the most obvious reasons of the lower birth rate in the city is the fact that fewer of the women of child-bearing ages are married. In the urban communities of the New England States only 53.9 per cent. of the women 15-44 years are married, widowed or divorced, while in the rural communities the percentage is 63.8 per cent. In the East North Central States the percentages are 59.2 and 63.2, respectively, while for the United States, as a whole, they are 57.8 and 64.6. Thus we see that, on the average, the proportion of the women married, widowed or divorced is about 7 per cent. less in the city than in the country. As has been shown above, however, the proportion of children to married women is much smaller in the city than in the country. Therefore, although the fact that many more women in the city do not marry or marry relatively late in life is an important cause of the low birth rate in the city, it is by no means the most important one.

The chief causes of the lower birth rate in the city may be summed up by saying that the people in the city more often voluntarily limit the size of their families than the people in the country. When we undertake to inquire into the causes of voluntary limitation of the family among city people, we find such widely different motives in operation in different classes of people that it becomes necessary to discuss the forces controlling the birth rate in each of these classes separately. I have divided the city population into four classes. The basis of the classification is the family income.<sup>s</sup>

(1) The poor, those with an income below \$750 per year. This class is composed chiefly of unskilled workers. (2) The comfortable, those having an income of from \$750 to \$1,500. Most skilled workmen belong to this class, also many people in clerical positions. (3) The well-to-do, those having incomes ranging from \$1,500 to \$4,000 or \$5,000. Most professional men and men in executive positions in industry and commerce belong to this class. (4) The wealthy, those with incomes of \$5,000 or over. Capitalists and those on the road to become capitalists belong to this class.

In the first class there is but little voluntary limitation of the size of the family. The two most important reasons why this is the case, are: (1) The people in this class do not know how to limit their families, (2) they do not care a great deal about limiting them, because they do not feel burden of a fairly large family as keenly as people in the higher classes.

There can be no doubt that the poor would practise voluntary limitation of their families much more than they do if they knew how. But as yet the laws forbidding the dissemination of such knowledge are quite successfully enforced against the poor. (In my judgment this is the only class of the population which the laws prevent from securing this knowledge and they bid fair to become ineffective even against them in a short time.) They have only been effective this long because this class depends largely upon free agencies for such medical attention and nursing as it secures, and because the members have no personal friends among doctors, nurses and others, who might tell them how to limit their families.

I believe, however, that even if the poor knew how to limit their families as generally as members of other classes, they would not put their knowledge into practise to the same extent. It is the customary thing among the poor to look forward to the economic aid of the child as soon as he or she can be put to work. In the sweating industries mere babies often add their pittance to the family income by "helping mother" with her work. Even where child-labor laws and school laws are well enforced, the parents can count on the aid of the children as soon as they are fourteen or fifteen years old. Not only does the child of poor parents cease to be a direct burden upon the parents very early, but there are usually several years in which it contributes more than its "keep" to the family income. Thus a family of four or five children may render the parents substantial aid for ten or fifteen years or even more. The parents very generally expect to get back the cost of the child before it strikes out for itself and they usually succeed. It may seem to many people that this attitude towards children is exceptional and is not a very important factor making for large families. I feel certain, however, that this attitude towards children is very general among poor people. The parents themselves were brought up to expect to go to work as soon as they were able and they expect the same of their children. The experience of those who have to do with the enforcement of child-labor laws shows that people in the poorer classes want their children to leave school and go to work at a very early age and that the children are quite willing to do so. This is the usual attitude

of poor people the world over. Hard conditions of life and simple forms of work make it necessary and possible for children while yet very young to help their parents and it is customary for them to do so. Old world ideas brought over by the immigrants also work in the same direction. The peasant economy of Europe has a place for the labor of the child and only too often the immigrants see no reason why the child should not go to work as young in this country as he would in the old country.

Many times the child begins to assist the parents at their work long before it is permitted to work regularly. It can do this quite easily, because both men and women do unskilled work. When the time comes that the child can leave school, it finds comparatively little difficulty in getting the same kind of a job as father or mother or a similar one. Children whose mothers work at home in the sweated trades can acquire all of the skill needed to do any of the work by the time they can leave school. When the boys are too big to work at the sweated trades they are able to go to the wharves with their fathers or do rough labor on construction work or any other of a thousand jobs which require no special preparation.

I would not imply that boys and girls in this class always do the same kind of work as their parents, but I do believe that the great majority of them do work of the same general nature. I should say that the boy whose father is a longshoreman and who himself becomes a deliveryman is staying in the same general class as his father. Similarly the boy who does the unskilled labor in a new subway is following in the steps of his father who is the janitor of a tenement. We are too apt to forget that only a small proportion of children can ever rise from the general class into which they are born.

I have many times been amazed at the utter lack of ambition among the children of unskilled laborers. But when one canvasses the situation carefully, one finds nothing in this attitude of children to cause surprise. They have been brought up to expect to go to work at an early age, their parents have never tried to instil into them the desire to better their lot. They have attended schools where no mention was ever made of occupations open to them, or if occupations of different kinds were brought to their attention, no efforts were made to inspire in them a desire to get into better occupations than those of their parents, and they have not been prepared to enter such occupations if the desire for them was implanted. In a word, everything in the life of the child of the poorer

classes tends to press it into the mode of life of its parents while almost nothing urges it to a different mode of life.

There are forces at work now, however, which seem to me to be bringing about a change in the attitude of parents in this class towards their children, and also to be breaking down the passive acceptance by children of the rôle chosen for them by their parents. More stringent child labor laws, better enforced, are making the children dependent upon their parents for a longer time and thus rendering it less economically advantageous for them to have relatively large families. Going hand in hand with the movement to prevent too early work among children is the movement for vocational guidance and occupational training. In so far as these movements arouse ambition in the children of the poorer classes and supply the training to help them realize their ambitions, we may expect to see them become less and less an economic asset to their families. As this takes place, there is not the least doubt but that the birth rate will fall.

It may well be that the effects of these movements on the birth rate in this class will not be very marked in this generation, but they will be in the next. Those who have themselves risen from the poor class will want to maintain their new standards and give their children at least as good a start as they themselves had, and those who wanted to rise, but were unable, will hope that by having only a fair-sized family they can give their children such advantages that they can rise. Thus the effects of better education and a longer period of childhood and preparation are certain to bring about a reduction of the birth rate.

It is not likely, so far as I can see, that the poorer classes will ever have as low a birth rate as the other classes. There will always be those who must do the unskilled work of the community and their children will, for the most part, take their places with the minimum of preparation allowed by law. Under such conditions the children of this class will naturally cease to be an expense to the family sooner than the children of the higher classes, and they will also be able to add something to the family income for several years before striking out for themselves. Thus in spite of greatly improved conditions children will always be more valuable economically to the poorer classes in the city than the other classes.

Another reason why I do not believe that the birth rate of the poor class will ever fall as low as that of the higher classes is that the poor class will always contain a greater proportion of improvident ne'er-do-wells than the other classes. People

who never look to the future, who make no plans for their own lives, who care little what becomes of their children, will always have large families. The motives of prudence and foresight operative in the higher classes are not operative among such people. No matter how widely the knowledge of birth control may be disseminated people who are shiftless, improvident and perhaps sub-normal will never restrict the size of their families to any appreciable degree.

Even though the poor class in the city has a rather high birth rate, it does not have a very high rate of natural increase (excess of births over deaths per 1,000 of the living population). If the rate of natural increase of the city population as a whole is about 5 or 6, then the rate of natural increase among the poor probably does not exceed 6 or 8. The reason it is not larger than this is that the death rate in the poor class is higher than that in any other class. The Children's Bureau has recently shown that infant mortality rises as the father's income becomes smaller. We also find that insurance companies charge a much higher premium on insurance sold to the poor class than to other classes. Moreover a comparison of the death rates of such cities as Boston and Indianapolis shows that the death rate of the former is considerably higher than that of the latter. The death rate of Fall River, Massachusetts, is still higher than that of Boston. It is, of course, impossible to tell what proportion of the people in these different places belongs to the poor class, but no one can reasonably doubt that it is greater in Boston and Fall River than in Indianapolis.

#### THE COMFORTABLE CLASS

**I**N the second class, voluntary limitation of the family is widely practised, though it is by no means universal. There are many people in this class who look upon their children in much the same way as those in the first class. In so far as this is the case, there is no need to dwell upon the motives at work. But there are also many influenced by motives that lead to the desire for a small family.

The skilled laborer who believes in the restriction of output and in the limitation of union membership can readily see the advantages in limiting the size of his family. If it is a good thing, from his standpoint, to control the amount of labor available for doing certain kinds of work then it is a good thing not to raise more children than he can find places for in his own trade or other trades of the same grade. A great many skilled mechanics have small families for no other reason than that

they believe this the most effective method of restricting the amount of labor and therefore of raising wages.

Many other people in this class raise small families because they hope to be able, thereby, to give their children better opportunities to rise into the higher classes. Many and many a family can be found among skilled laborers and clerical workers putting forth its utmost efforts to give at least one of the children a better start than its father had. In such cases, the child instead of becoming an economic asset at fourteen or fifteen years of age becomes an increasingly heavy economic burden in the years after he leaves the common school. Not only is the child a charge for a much longer period, but in the degree that the parents are successful in launching him upon his career in a higher class, they must expect to forego any return on their investment, for it takes so long to attain even a moderate degree of financial success in these higher classes that parents seldom live to see their children achieve it.

Of equal effect with ambition for one's children in causing restriction of the size of the family is ambition for oneself. There are many men in this class who feel that children would be a hindrance to them in attaining a higher position. There are also many women who have social ambitions or who desire to continue their work outside the home after marriage. In either case children are not wanted and voluntary limitation of the family is practised. Since, however, personal ambition is much more common in the third class than in this, I shall not discuss it further here.

The lack of training for women in home-making which is so prevalent among all classes of city women shows its effects most markedly in this class. The girls usually leave school after they have finished the grades or early in their high-school course and work for several years in factories, stores or offices before they are married. The work they do is very largely unskilled and requires little thought or close attention. In many factories they repeat a single simple process over again and again until it becomes purely mechanical. In the stores only a few ever learn more than the simple mechanical parts of salesmanship. Even in offices as stenographers and filing clerks, their work is but little less mechanical than in factories and stores. In any event the work of the girl who expects to work only until she gets married very seldom offers much opportunity for her to develop responsibility, self-reliance or foresight. Instead of preparing girls for home-makers, such work as they do induces careless habits and an indifferent attitude towards work of all kinds which is demoralizing in the extreme. These girls never

learn to regard work as the normal and proper condition of life. They do not know what it means to find work interesting and to put the best of themselves into it. They rather come to regard work as a necessary evil to be endured for a given length of time daily either because they must work to live or because they need the money to have a good time outside of working hours.

The girls are not primarily to blame that they so regard their work. The organization of our industrial system is such that most girls never get a chance to do work that is interesting to them nor do they ever have their attention called to the opportunities for self-expression in their work. It is not the least surprising, therefore, that these girls have never developed the qualities which make a successful and happy wife and mother. Such qualities as patience, economy, foresight, good taste and adaptability—essentials to a happy life under all conditions—are not to be acquired with the taking of the marriage vows; they must be developed slowly through the years. In my judgment the work of these girls not only does little to help them develop such qualities, but often actually aids in developing other traits of character which unfit them for home life, *e. g.*, carelessness, shirking, selfishness, irresponsibility and vulgarity. The woman who looks upon her daily life in the home as she looked upon her day's work in the factory or store before she was married is quite certain to find little there which will compensate her for raising a family. When this attitude towards the home exists, when all the good things of life are thought to lie outside of the daily routine of home life, family limitation will be practised if the woman knows how.

Although the birth rate in this class is considerably lower than in the first class I believe that the rate of natural increase is not much different, for the death rate is also lower. But it may well be that in recent years with the improvement of the public health agencies administering to the poor the rate of natural increase of the poor has come to exceed that of this class. Unfortunately we have no very conclusive evidence on this point.

#### THE WELL-TO-DO CLASS

In the third class voluntary restriction of the size of the family is almost universal. In addition, late marriages and celibacy contribute to a very low birth rate. The motives leading to late marriage and celibacy do not need much special attention because they are the same, in general, as those leading to the rearing of small families among those who are married. It



may be that the ease and comfort in which both bachelor men and women can live in the cities are motives which of themselves lead many to forego marriage, but I believe that ambition in various forms is the most potent motive leading to celibacy, as it is to family restriction.

Most professional and managerial positions offer abundant opportunities for advancement to capable, wide-awake, energetic, men and women. Honor and wealth are the rewards of diligence in these positions. The ambitious young man who goes into business hopes soon to leave the well-to-do class and join the wealthy as do many who go into the professions. There are many in the professions who do not care to leave this class, but rather who are ambitious to gain recognition through scholarly or artistic work, which is more dear to them than wealth. In either case—in seeking honor or wealth, or both—personal ambition is the dominating motive in life and has a great deal of influence upon the size of the family raised.

The young man in business who sees vistas ahead in which he may exert power through wealth has little time or inclination to give of himself to his family. He may be quite willing to meet the expenses of a relatively large family; but he is so immersed in his work that he is likely to forget to be human. He probably expects his wife to shoulder the entire burden of worry and care at home, so that he will not be distracted from his work. The wife soon becomes weary of bearing her burden alone and is ready to take measures to prevent it from becoming greater. So it is that the ambition of the father lies at the basis of family restriction in many cases.

Again the father may feel that he needs all the money he can possibly save to further his business plans and so takes means to prevent the coming of children. He often feels also that he will be hampered in his freedom of movement by even a fair-sized family. Then there is always the element of chance in business, and a man may not be willing to give hostages to fortune until he can be reasonably sure that he can redeem them. In the professions the situation is much the same, with the exception that the goal is more often recognition of some kind than mere wealth. Better than wealth to a lawyer may be the appointment to the Supreme Bench, better than wealth to a physician may be the discovery of some new means of aiding mankind, better than wealth to the engineer may be the successful completion of some public work, *e. g.*, a Panama Canal, better than wealth to the scholar may be the writing of an essay which will inspire good thoughts and noble ambitions

in his fellows. But the way to success in the professions is slow and laborious, and even a moderate-sized family may make the ascent much slower and more difficult.

There are also numerous cases in this class in which the man marries so that he may increase his acquaintance among men who may be of help to him through the social activities of his wife. Many such marriages are childless, while many more have only a single child.

It is quite likely, however, that only a small proportion of the women who spend much of their time and energy in *social life* do so with the object of furthering their husbands' interests; most of them have social ambitions of their own. The care and expense of even a single child will seriously curtail the social activities of a woman of this class and so, many times, children are sacrificed to social ambitions. Children tie a woman to the home rather closely for a good many years if she gives them a true mother's care. They are also expensive. No doubt the woman in this class very often has to make a choice between another child and some cherished object which will further her social ambitions. An automobile, a new home, new furniture or more expensive clothes will each and all enhance one's social position and keep one before the attention of one's friends, while another child will withdraw one from their attention for a considerable time and make it more difficult to appear so well in their eyes. Only too often the temptation of the easy and immediately pleasant way out overcomes them and they shirk the real duty of a woman.

Like the mistrained or untrained women of the lower classes, women of this class who "go in for" social life see no satisfaction to be derived from the daily routine of the home. The dearest objects in life lie outside the home. Nowhere among their friends and acquaintances do they encounter any disapprobation of the frivolous, meaningless lives they are leading, for they are all of a feather. If it is to women of this type that the charge of parasitism, so often heard now-a-days, refers, it is very largely justified.

Again there are many women in this class who want a "career." They want to be independent economically and socially. Some of these women do not marry, but more of them do marry, although relatively late. Of those who do marry, many regard their work essential to the highest self-respect and self-development and therefore find no place in their lives for the bearing and raising of children. Happily there is a reaction, in late years, from the extreme type of feminism prevalent about a generation ago, which taught that for a

woman to be dependent on a man for support was disgraceful and not to be tolerated by any woman of strong character.

But by no means are all the women of this class of the type that would prefer not to have children. The majority, without doubt, are women who find a satisfying existence in simple home life. But even such women do not desire large families, for they find the raising of children in the city a task of ever-increasing difficulty.

As I have watched the child life of the cities, especially among this class of people, I have often wondered that they tried to raise children at all. Children are not wanted in most apartment houses in desirable sections of the city, nor will single houses be rented to families with children if those without can be secured. Open places for play, close at hand, are generally lacking, while a private yard where one's children hold undisputed sway is almost unknown. Thus the naturally venturesome spirit of youth has no place in which to express itself in ways useful to the child and not troublesome to others. On the other hand, the opportunities to get into mischief seem to be unlimited.

Our cities to-day seem to be organized for the repression of the natural life of the child rather than to encourage its normal expression. *Don't! Don't! You must not! Get out of the way! What are you doing here! are apparent everywhere, while, Come on! Take part! Enjoy yourself! Here is a place for you!* are scarcely visible anywhere. Because of these conditions it is not unlikely that, in this class where standards of living are high and income not sufficient to permit of much help in the home, one child causes more work and worry than several in the lower classes.

But aside from the care and expense of raising children while they are comparatively young, parents in this class generally have to provide for their children for a much longer period than those in the lower classes. At the age the child of the poorer classes begins to be self-supporting the child in this class begins to make greater demands upon the economic resources of its parents. Prevision and foresight are well developed in these people and consequently they make definite plans, so that their resources will meet their own needs and provide a good start in life for their children. Expenses during high school, college, technical school and possibly even for a year or two while getting a foothold in some profession, generally strain the family resources to the limit when the family is small. Therefore a large family is not desired.

The desire for travel is another motive often leading to the restriction of the size of the family in this class. It needs no

argument to show that children make travel more difficult both from the standpoint of expense and from that of leisure. Each child born increases the normal expenses of the family and makes it more difficult for the parents to take their children with them or to leave them behind when they travel. Thus with the growth of the family the likelihood of being able to travel decreases. Therefore, where there is a strong desire to travel, a "trip" very often is chosen as the alternative to another child.

The desire to attain culture is also a motive leading to family restriction in many cases. A certain amount of leisure and freedom from harassing care are necessary to the development of a cultured personality. A large family of children or even a moderate-sized family is apt to make the work and the worry of maintaining class standards so difficult that one will have little energy or inclination for anything beyond the daily routine. The realization that this is likely to take place causes many people to raise only one or two children. They feel that the sacrifice of self-development involved in rearing more is too great.

We have no very extensive data bearing on the birth rate and death rate in this class, but such data as we have seem to justify the conclusion that there is no natural increase. My own belief is that this class does not produce enough children to keep up its numbers, but we must await further investigations before we can be certain on this point.

#### THE WEALTHY CLASS

There is no sharp line dividing the fourth class from the third either in regard to the motives leading to family restriction or the rate of natural increase. Family limitation is almost universal in the fourth class and ambition in one form or another is the most powerful motive leading to it.

This class is quite small, comprising not more than two or three hundred thousand families (judging from the federal income tax returns). The great majority of the men belonging to it are men having incomes near the lower limit. Most of these men hope very soon to increase their incomes and are struggling desperately to rise. Nowhere in our population is the competition more strenuous than between men who have attained some measure of success and whose appetite for it is therefore insatiable. These men are "climbers" in their lines and very often their wives are social "climbers." Thus the chief interests of both husband and wife lie outside the home and children are regarded as a burden. Such people have no real home life and do not care enough for it to stop scrambling

for position. The husband only too often thinks of his wife as the means to a larger acquaintance among people who may be able to help him along and the wife regards the husband and home merely as necessary incidents to respectability. The result is that their families almost never comprise more than two children and very often none at all.

These "climbers" have neither accumulated wealth nor do they have very assured positions in society. They have therefore nothing definite to bequeath to their children. They have no pride of family urging them to leave descendants to carry on the family name and traditions; they have no definite position in the community, which they can be assured of transmitting to their children. These people are themselves adrift, they know not whither they are bound, and many of them feel, in their more serious moments, that life is so uncertain and there is so little worth while to be got out of it that they will save trouble all around if they have no children.

On the other hand, among the wealthy, whose position is assured, there is a certain amount of pride in one's family, leading them to rear children to carry on the family name and fortune. They have not only wealth but a much-coveted position in the community which they can command for their descendants. This portion of the wealthy class probably more nearly reproduces itself than the "climbing" portion.

Undoubtedly the sheltered lives of ease and luxury led by many girls in the wealthy class and even by some in the well-to-do class disincline them to undergo the hardships of bearing and rearing a family. To a girl who has been brought up in the belief that her own whims and desires are of prime importance and that all values are to be judged by these pampered inclinations it is often inconceivable that she should deliberately do any thing to bring herself pain and work and worry and probably even deprivation of some customary luxuries. Such girls brought up apart from the stern realities of life are not capable of judging values aright. They know little of the feelings and values which grow up naturally when men and women struggle side by side, help to bear one another's burdens, share sorrows as well as joys and, above all, live close to the great streams of simple, work-a-day humanity. Women whose only passion is for ease and luxury lose touch with humanity and substitute for true human values those of a small and highly institutionalized class.

It is especially unfortunate that the women of this class do not rear moderate-sized families, because they are so widely imitated by the women in other classes.

*(To be continued)*